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RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ PRIORITY 2052
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 0293
RUEHMU/AMEMBASSY MANAGUA PRIORITY 1249
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO PRIORITY 3801
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0733
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 2132
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE PRIORITY 0973
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0246
RUEHMI/USOFFICE FRC FT LAUDERDALE PRIORITY 3206
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0749
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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 001612

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER OPPOSITION GOVERNOR HELD ON CORRUPTION
CHARGES

Classified By: Robert Downes, Political Counselor,
for Reason 1.4(b).

¶1. (U) Eduardo Lapi, the former opposition governor of Yaracuy State, was detained by state security police (DISIP) in the state capital of San Felipe on May 30 in relation to charges of corruption during his administration. Lapi had been accused in January of violating bidding procedures in awarding a contract for a highway in Yaracuy state. According to press reports, Lapi's residence was raided by DISIP agents at the order of state prosecutors. As of this writing, Lapi remained in custody at DISIP facilities in Yaracuy pending a decision by prosecutors on whether to seek an arrest warrant.

¶2. (C) Lapi was an outspoken critic of President Hugo Chavez during his tenure. One of his now infamous accomplishments was the invention of "morochas," or clone parties, to defeat the constitutional requirement of proportional representation. Lapi was a central figure in the Convergencia Party, the electoral vehicle Rafael Caldera founded in 1993 to win a second presidential term.

¶3. (U) The ex-governor's wife, Janeth Rojas, told reporters that the Lapi residence had been raided four times during the investigation, which began shortly after Lapi left office in November 2004. Rojas called the charges a purely political maneuver by the current governor, Carlos Gimenez (of Chavez' Fifth Republic Movement, MVR), who himself is accused with corruption and, Rojas claims, is seeking to distract attention from his problems with Lapi's detention. In a statement, the prosecutor's office denied all charges of political influence in the case, adding that the judge involved in the case considered Lapi a flight risk, explaining why Lapi was detained. The judge had not yet decided whether Lapi would be freed on bail prior to a trial. The statement said that further charges against Lapi had not been ruled out, and that six others related to the corruption charges were sought by police.

Comment

¶4. (C) The BRV has been threatening Lapi and several other opposition officials who left office in 2004 with mishandling funds. Former Miranda Governor Enrique Mendoza, who led the Coordinadora Democratica against Chavez in the 2004 referendum, has also been charged with corruption in the procurement of public goods. Former Anzoategui Governor David Da Lima, similarly, was charged with damages to the gubernatorial residence by the incoming governor's wife. While the immediate facts in Yaracuy suggests that indeed the current governor is attacking a political rival, we cannot rule out that the national government also has an interest in impugning Lapi's reputation. We note , too, that the BRV is pursuing charges against former elected officials of the opposition while the current government is awash in corruption scandals. Knowing it has a probity problem, the BRV is likely trying to show that corruption runs just as freely among the opposition as with the government. We cannot say whether Lapi is guilty of the charges, but it is a safe bet the charges are politically motivated.

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